



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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NEWSLETTER - Volume 2, Issue No. 6
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National TCF Website:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcftopeka.org

November ~ December 2017
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NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 27, 2017
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Forgiveness and Gratitude - Many bereaved people find that issues of forgiveness can play a big part in their healing process. Sometimes the inability to forgive can prove a stumbling block towards growth and healing on your grief journey. Let's talk about the topic of forgiveness—do we feel the need to forgive ourselves for something we may have said or done while our child was still alive? Do we need to forgive those we may feel were in some way responsible for our child's death? Do we need to forgive our child for actions they may have taken that resulted in their death? Forgiveness can be a complex topic and we will try and explore some of the reasons why forgiveness can be a healing element in our grief work. Gratitude may be a word most would not include in the grief process, but it is also important, in the midst of our pain, to remember those people and things for which we are most grateful; also to remember with gratitude, the joy our loved ones brought into our lives.

MEMORIAL CANDLE LIGHTING

Monday, December 18, 2017
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Please Note Date Change!!

Memorial Candle Lighting - Please plan to join us for this special event to honor the lives of our children, grandchildren and siblings who "left too soon". You are asked to bring a framed photo of your loved one (if you do not have photos, plan to bring something that represents them to you). During the Candle Lighting we will share special music, poetry and each person will have an opportunity to light a votive candle in memory of that special life and place that candle by their photo/memento. After the Candle Lighting we will have a time for fellowship and refreshments. You are encouraged to bring your or your child's favorite holiday treat to share with the group. Votive candles are provided. **PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE: This event takes the place of our regular December support group meeting.**

Meetings are always held on the fourth Monday of each month unless otherwise noted. Listen to radio & TV for cancellations due to severe weather conditions.

This newsletter is sponsored by:

*Gary and Susan Chan in loving memory of their daughter
Rachael Reneé Chan who was born on December 28th*

*Mark and Debi Harvey in loving memory of their son
Nathan Harvey who was born on December 9th*



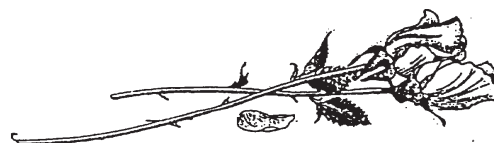
*Alfonso and Sheila D. Locke in loving memory of their
son Christen (Chris) Edward Locke who was born on
November 29th*

*Gene and Sandy Reams in loving memory of their son
Adam J. Reams who was born on November 24th*

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purposes are to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experience following the death of a child of any age, from any cause; and to foster the physical and emotional health of all bereaved parents, grandparents and surviving siblings.

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We Need Not Walk Alone



From the Newsletter Editor

Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

I would like to thank all of you who participated in our 24th Annual Memorial Picnic and Dove Release at Lake Shawnee. We hope it was a meaningful and healing event for all of you as we remembered our children, grandchildren and siblings who left us too soon. I would especially like to thank Damon and Collene Tucker, Brittany's parents, for sponsoring the rental of the shelter house for this event. Sincere thanks also go out to Terry Fleer who donated the meat for our potluck in memory of his daughter Amber Fleer. The lovely Dove Cake was provided by Duane and Mary Eberhardt in memory of their son Jerry. The plantable wildflower dove mementoes were sponsored by my husband Gary and myself in memory of our daughter Rachael. These kinds of events do not come together without the work of many people so I would also like to thank Jessica's mother Jennifer Meyer and Aurora's parents Chris and Trista Phillipi for their help in setting up and cleaning up after the event. We hope you will think about joining us next year for this special memorial event honoring all those special lives who touched ours.

Coming up on Sunday, December 10th will be The Compassionate Friends 21st Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting. This event is believed to be the largest mass candle lighting in the world and begins at 7:00 p.m. in each time zone, literally providing 24



hours of candle light around the globe in memory of our loved ones. There is also a Remembrance Book posted on the TCF National website (www.compassionatefriends.org) that evening in which you may leave a message for or about your child. It was interesting several years ago when I served as one of the Remembrance Book moderators to see the messages coming in from all around the world, many in other languages as bereaved families shared their love for their child, grandchild or sibling.

A week later, on Monday, December 18th, our Topeka Chapter will host our Holiday Memorial Candle Lighting at 7:00 p.m. in the Formation Room at Most Pure Heart of Mary Church. You are encouraged to bring a photo of your child in a tabletop frame to put out on the Memory Table. We will offer a program of music, poems, readings and an opportunity for you to say your loved one's name as you light a votive candle and place it by their photo. Votive candles will be provided for you. If you do not have a photo, please feel free to bring an item that reminds you of your child by which you may place your candle. It has also been the tradition at this memorial event to encourage those attending to bring their or their child's favorite holiday treat to share with the group during refreshment and fellowship time after the program. **Please note that this event is earlier than our usual 4th Monday meeting time and also that it replaces our regular support group meeting for the month of December.**

We continue to generate much needed funding for our Chapter expenses (including this newsletter) through the Dillions Community Rewards Program. Our latest check was for \$195.64 for the period from 1 July through 30 September. If you haven't signed up yet, please see instructions below and help us continue to have this important passive income stream.

We invite you to join us at a monthly support group meeting. We always have interesting topics related to grief to talk about, provide an opportunity to share your thoughts and feelings in a safe, non judgemental setting, and a chance to talk about your child, grandchild or sibling. There is really nothing quite like being in a room with people who truly do understand what this type of loss can mean and how it can affect our lives in so many different ways. This group offers support and hope and we welcome you to join us. There is never any obligation to speak or participate in the discussion if you don't care to do so; but much can be learned by listening to others who are walking this path. There are never any dues or required fees to participate.

Until next time, be gentle with yourself and let the healing happen. Remember, You Need Not Walk Alone

~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom



*"Hope isn't a place or a thing.
Hope isn't the absence of pain or sadness or sorrow.
Hope is possibility.
Hope is the memory of love given and received."*

~ Darcie Sims

TCF National Office e-mail:
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Compassionate Friends web address:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:
www.tcftopeka.org tcftopeka@gmail.com

Kansas Regional Coordinator:
Marty & Renda Weaver - (785) 823-7191
mweaver@cox.net

Dillions Community Rewards Program Helps Fund Chapter Expenses - A REMINDER - Have you signed up for the Dillions Community Rewards Program yet? If not, we encourage you to do so as it really helps to bring income into our Chapter to help meet expenses. The more participants we have, the more income we can generate. I encourage you to go to www.dillions.com/community-rewards and click on "Register" at the top of the page. When you enroll you will be asked to designate which charity you wish to support. The Topeka Compassionate Friends Chapter NPO number is 65403. Once you have done so and have a Dillions Shopper's Card, every time you make a purchase at Dillions a portion of your total will be donated to the Topeka TCF Chapter. Participating in this program **costs you nothing** and **does not affect your fuel points** for gasoline purchases. If you need assistance in setting up your account, call toll-free at 1-800-576-4377 and select Option 3.

Love Gifts

**Your Love Gifts Help Spread
the Message of Hope & Healing ~ Won't You Help Today?**

What is a Love Gift? A Love Gift is a gift of money (or books, etc.) to The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in memory of a child, grandchild or sibling who has died, but it may be from individuals who wish to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanks that their children are alive, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help. The Compassionate Friends charges *no individual dues* or fees and depends on such Love Gifts to meet the Chapter's expenses, including the printing and mailing of this newsletter. **When you make a donation, make sure to check to see if your employer may have a "matching gifts" program** as this could double the amount of your donation. If you are not sure whether your company has such a program, check with your Personnel Department.

♥ *Marty and Julie Garren in loving memory of their daughter Heidi Garren Everley who died on November 21st*

♥ *Eric Naill in loving memory of his daughter Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill*

Your gifts enable us to print this newsletter and reach out to newly bereaved families. Donations are our only source of income and are **tax deductible**. If you would like to sponsor a newsletter, the cost is \$30.00. If we have more than one sponsor, we recognize all of them. If you wish to send a Love Gift, any amount is appreciated. It is whatever you feel you can give. Donations of books that you have found helpful to the Topeka Chapter Library are also greatly appreciated, and it is a nice way to remember your child or other loved one. If you would like to send a Love Gift or a Newsletter Sponsorship, you may do so by sending it to: The Compassionate Friends, c/o Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. For Newsletter Sponsorships, please indicate which issue you wish to sponsor (Jan/Feb, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, or November/December). Makes checks payable to "TCF".

An Update on the Chapter Newsletter

As I mentioned in last newsletters, we have established an electronic list of those who prefer to receive the newsletter via e-mail. If you have not requested to be on the e-newsletter list, you will continue to be mailed a hard copy of the newsletter. Remember, you can also always access the current and past issues of our newsletter on our Chapter website at www.tcftopeka.org under "Newsletters". Those families whose loved one died in 2017 are automatically kept on the mailing list for one full year unless they request in writing to have their name removed. You are all asked to send any address changes (hard copy or e-mail) to tcftopeka@gmail.com

Upcoming Events/Dates to Remember

December 10, 2017 - The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting begins at 7:00 p.m. in each time zone. Memorial Book to leave a message will be available on the National Compassionate Friends website (www.compassionatefriends.org)

December 18, 2017 - The Topeka Chapter's Memorial Candle Lighting will be held in the Formation Room at Most Pure Heart. Starts promptly at 7 p.m. Votive candles will be provided. More info under Newsletter Editor's Note.

January 19 & 20, 2018 - Teen Grief Retreat (ages 12-18) also sponsored by the Center for Hope and Healing/Midland Hospice Care. For further info, contact Suz McIver at 785-221-7359.

Sites of Future National TCF Conferences:

2018 ~ St. Louis MO - 41st National July 27-29, 2018
2019 ~ Philadelphia, PA
2020 ~ Atlanta, GA
2021 ~ Detroit, MI
2022 ~ Houston, TX

CALL FOR PHOTOS

If you would like your loved one's photo included in our TCF Chapter's December memorial slide presentation, please do one of the following:

1. If you have computer access and can send a jpg file of your child's photo electronically, please send to: dtucker35@cox.net. Be sure to include your loved one's full name, birth and death dates.

2. If you are not able to send a photo file electronically, you may send a photo print (do not send the only copy you have!) so that we may scan it into digital format. Send the photo plus the full name, birth and death dates for your loved one to: Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return of your photo. We will continue to collect photos throughout the year to add to the slide presentation. **If you have already sent in a photo, you need not resend one.**

3. The Memorial Slide Presentation is a part of our Annual December Candle Lighting Memorial.

Our Thanks to: Midland Care Connection for giving us a mailbox and Most Pure Heart of Mary Church for allowing us to meet at their facility. A special Thank You to ProPrint for helping to underwrite the printing cost of this newsletter.

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838 MASSACHUSETTS ST
LAWRENCE, KS 66044
785.842.3610

1033 SW GAGE BLVD, STE 200
TOPEKA, KS 66604
785.272.0070

And We Remember.....

*Because of the potential for the hurtful crime of identity theft, TCF Chapter Newsletters will now only publish the date of a child's birth or death without listing the year of each event. This is a directive from the National TCF Office to protect all TCF members. **Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing list will be included in the We Remember section***

Josephine I. Alcala, daughter of Pricilla Alcala, who was born on January 13th and died on January 14th

Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond, who died on December 3rd

Olivia Anderson, daughter of Suzannah Anderson; sister of Eli Anderson, who died on January 17th

Lori Ann Becerra, daughter of Mike and Ginny Becerra, born on December 15th and died on December 15th

Ryan Broxterman, son of Kevin and Susan Broxterman, who died on December 6th

Aaron M. Campbell, son of Marilyn Campbell, who died on January 29th

Rachael Reneé Chan, daughter of Gary and Susan Chan, who was born on December 28th

Heidi Garren Everley, daughter of Marty and Julie Garren, who was born on January 22nd

Rebecca Lynne Smith Crismas, daughter of BobbyJean Smith, who died on January 7th

Kevin Lee Cronister, son of Richard and Judy Cronister, who died on December 10th

Angel Winter Dawn Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 25th

Claire Elise Fisher, daughter of Debra Fisher, died on January 2nd

Ryan Flanagan, son of Dennis Flanagan, who died on December 3rd

Spenser Thomas Good, son of Margaret Kramar, born on January 30th

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, born on December 15th

Nathan Harvey, son of Mark and Debi Harvey; brother of Rachel, Amanda and Caleb Harvey; grandson of Velata Tibbs, born on December 9th

Shawn Michael Hatfield, son of Hank and Cathy Harman, born on January 11th; died on December 5th

Austin Tyler Miller, grandson of Earl and Linda Frey, stillborn on December 3rd

David D. Morris, son of Merwin (Bud) and Velma C. Morris, born on December 18th

Eric Alan Palmberg, son of Jim and Doris Palmberg, died on January 1st

Greg Lee Paulson, son-in-law of Frank and Brenda Bissey and brother-in-law of Brad Bissey, born on January 24th

Krystil M. Pearson, daughter of Patti Cox and sister of Kendall Pressler, who was born on December 24th

Adam James Reams, son of Gene and Sandy Reams, brother of Nick Reams, who died on January 23rd

Kathryn (Katie) Rush, daughter of Thomas and Barbara Rush, died on January 24th

Jamie Lynn Russell, daughter of John and Elaine Chandler, born on January 7th; died on December 29th

Evan Michael Schuetz, son of Tom and Debbie Schuetz, born on January 23rd

Gregg W. Scott, son of Garry and Jo Scott, died on December 8th

Patrick Sprowl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sprowl, died on December 10th

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, born on December 13th

Keith Strathman, son of Don and Julie Strathman, brother of Becky Strathman, died on January 8th

Brandon Toler, son of Marty Tyson, who died on January 18th

Mary Jane Varner, daughter of Will and Kay Hasty, died on January 3rd

(Use the form below to submit your listing if you have not already done so. Once you have submitted your listing you **do not** have to do so every year as long as you remain active on our mailing list. Your child's name and dates will remain on the We Remember database unless you request their removal or choose to discontinue receiving this newsletter. This month's listing includes birth and death anniversary dates for December and January.

And We Remember - If you wish your child, grandchild or sibling included in the We Remember section of this newsletter, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email the information to chanx2@cox.net< We do not automatically list your information just because you are receiving this newsletter. We only list information for those parents requesting it. If you have previously submitted your child's information and it has appeared in the newsletter during the past year, you **do not** need to resubmit it. If you have just begun receiving this newsletter, or have never submitted this information, you will need to do so in order for it to be included. **Please type or print clearly.**

Child's Name _____ Son _____ Daughter _____ Grandchild _____ Brother _____ Sister _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Death _____

Father _____ Mother _____

Note: Please list your address and phone number. You will only be contacted if there is a question about your listing.

Is this a change of address for you? (please circle) YES NO

A Season of Many Feelings

Fall is a season of many feelings.
Autumn is here once again
as it comes every year.
And with the falling leaves my falling tears.
This time of year is the hardest of all.
My heart is still breaking,
Once again it is Fall.
Memories once so vivid
are seeming to fade,
My time spent with you seems
from some other age.
This season reminds me of grief and of pain.
But yet it teaches of hope and joy once again.
For the trees are still living
beneath their gray bark,
And you my sweet child are
alive in my heart.

~Cindy Schake, TCF Butler, PA



Missing You At Christmas

Every day without you
Since you had to go
Is like summer without sunshine
And Christmas without snow.



I know that I can talk to you
There's so much I will say.
Life has changed so very much
Since you went away.

I feel the bond between us
A gift that can't be bought.
You're in my mind and in my heart
With every Christmas thought.

I'll always feel you close to me
And though you're far from sight
I'll search for you among the stars
That shine on Christmas night.

~ Jenny Whaley, Chris' Mom
Database Manager
TCF Front Range Chapters Newsletter

Tissues, Tears & Treasures

A circle of chairs and boxes of tissues,
A roomful of tears and emotional issues.
Frightening at first, I did not want to enter
Into this strange group, and be in the center.

What I soon learned, as we sat side by side,
We were bound by the love of our children who died.
Each shattered heart,
desperately seeking a moment of peace,
from the pain and weeping.
So many things different, and yet all the same,
Hearts lost in a fog of loss and pain.
Those who have journeyed, much further than me,
Reached out in comfort, listened quietly.
Each shattered heart spoke, and the tissues were passed,

We never avoid speaking of the past.
This circle of friends, have found a bond,
And here I'm still known
As "Tony's Mom."
Slowly, I've found
I can reach out to others
Who are newly bereaved, fathers and mothers.
Strength I have found in this
Circle of chairs,
To grieve and to heal
And to show that we care.

~ Diane Barta
TCF Portland, OR
In Memory of my son, Tony



A Special and Important Message to Our New Compassionate Friends

If you are newly bereaved and have recently attended your first Compassionate Friends meeting, you may have left the meeting feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared at meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return. We would like to let you know that these feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least **three** tries before you decide whether or not the meetings are for you. You will find a network of caring and support which will help you as you travel your grief journey, and most assuredly, you will find hope along the way. We truly care about you and want to make certain that no bereaved parent ever needs to walk this path alone.

---Topeka TCF Chapter Steering Committee

Additional Support Group Resources

HEALs - Healing after loss of suicide offers support to all survivors affected by the loss of a loved one to suicide. Meetings are at 6:30-8:00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Pozez Center (north side of Stormont Vail). Contact Information: Sandy Reams 785-249-3792 or email TopekaHeals@gmail.com

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Group - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 6-8 p.m. at the Pozez Education Center. The group, which has regular meetings to share information and experiences, also has a blog for members that offers communication, resources and support. If you are interested in learning more about the blog, please email lrosen@stormontvail.org. For information call (785) 354-5225.

From Victims to Survivors - Support group for families who have had a loved one murdered. The group meets the fourth or last Wednesday of each month at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4775 S.W. 21st. For more information, call Bill Lucero at 232-5958 or see <http://fromvictimstosurvivors.com>.

Are You Moving?

If you move, please let us know your new address so you can continue to receive this newsletter. It costs the Chapter 71 cents every time a newsletter is returned by the Post Office with an outdated address. Please send address changes to: Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may email address changes to chanx2@cox.net. We appreciate your cooperation as this will save the Chapter money which can be better spent on bereavement outreach. If, for any reason, you wish to have your name removed from our mailing list, please drop me a note or email and I will take your name off the list.

TCF Mission Statement: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.



Find us on:
facebook®

TCF National Page (open group)

<https://www.facebook.com/TCFUSA/>

Los Amigos Compasivos/USA

<https://www.facebook.com/LACUSA/>

TCF Private Facebook Groups

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>

Loss of a Child

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/407123299460580/>

Sounds of the Siblings (bereaved siblings only)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

Loss of a Grandchild

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/421759177998317/>

Sign up for Compassionate Friends E-Newsletter

The Compassionate Friends National Office publishes a monthly e-newsletter designed to keep you up-to-date on what's going on with the organization and its chapters.

The e-newsletter includes information on such things as TCF National Conferences, the Walk to Remember, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, regional conferences, and other events of importance.

All you have to do to receive The Compassionate Friends e-newsletter is sign up for it online by visiting The Compassionate Friends national website at www.compassionatefriends.org and filling out the request to sign-up at the bottom of the page.

TCF Suicide Survivors Facebook Page

Compassionate Friends has a new Facebook page: TCF - Loss to Suicide. This page is open to parents, grandparents and siblings who have lost loved ones to suicide. There is no good way to lose a loved one; different causes create specific pain that can be eased sharing with another experiencing a similar loss. Co-moderators, Cathy Seehuetter and Donna Adams welcome you to this special closed page. To join you may go to http://www.compassionatefriends.org/Online_Support/survivors_of_suicide.aspx

A Candle for My Child

Each night as darkness settles over our home, a little candle begins flickering in the east window of our stair case landing. The tiny light burns until dawn and then silently is quenched with the rising sun. This is my son's light. About a year after Todd died, the leader of our chapter suggested a candle in the window for the holidays, as I had no inclination to decorate. I placed a candle there, and I have now replaced that candle with yet another candle. This is Todd's candle.....this is Todd's light.

Todd's candle has a Victorian appearance and will burn steady or flicker. When the darkness comes forth, Todd's candle begins its nightly vigil.....a vigil that will not end until I am dead. Although this is a small gesture, it has deep meaning for me. Sometimes I awaken in the middle of the night and walk into the atrium at the foot of the steps by the light of Todd's candle. I'll grab a glass of water and watch the candle flicker. Other times in the early evening, when only a reading lamp is lit in the living room, I will look into the atrium. Todd's light shines. I feel as if he is with me somehow, in the light of this little candle. I think about him, his life, his joys, his sorrows, his immense capacity to love and to laugh. I feel a deep closeness to my son that cannot be explained to anyone but those who have lost a child. I understand that there is much peace and solace in keeping my child in my heart and life and in establishing my own private rituals of remembrance.

Leaving a candle in the window has been an American tradition since the Colonial Era. The candle symbolizes the warmth and security of the family home and its message is loyalty to a family member who is not present. So, it is fitting that Todd's candle shines each night.....reminding all that he is absent from our home, but not our hearts.

Each of us has a ritual of remembrance of our child. Some of us have consciously established this. Others have unconsciously done so. But there is a ritual that brings our child close to us, only to us. Our rituals are a very personal choice. I chose not to share my ritual for 2 ½ years. Then one day a child who lives across the street asked me about the candle. I told her that it is my son's candle. She asked if he was in Iraq. "No, I said, he's in heaven."

A momentary look of fright passed over her face, and then she smiled. "I thought you had kids. You act like a mom."

Her innocent comment about me "acting like a mom" once again reinforced the fact that we will always be parents. Those of us who have children who have died will always be parents to those children. That role has shaped who we are, and intensified it more with the death of our precious child.

This is one element of losing a child that escapes the general population. If you have not lost a child, you don't understand, you can't understand the feelings and emotions that run so deeply in our psyches and our souls.



Our Compassionate Friends understand those emotions and our need to speak of our children, to deal with our overwhelming loss. Whether for a season or the rest of our lives, we have been good friends for each other. When I see Todd's candle, I think of my child, other parents, their children, their loss, my loss, the totality of the sorrow that enters our meeting room every month, and yet, I also think of the joy. There is a peaceful joy, a sense of serenity in knowing you are not alone and isolated in your unique grief. Others are walking with you on the road of life after the death of their children.

So now, when I gaze at Todd's candle, I remember his life, the security he felt within these walls, the growing up years, the love, loyalty and emotional stability he experienced as a child which enabled him to become a man of courage, self confidence and gentleness in the face of life's worst and best. I think of the other children and the parents left behind..... the sons and daughters of my Compassionate Friends. These children are missed, they are loved and they, too, are kept forever in a parent's heart. Their parents share a common bond with me that will follow each of us to our last day. We have lost our precious, beautiful children. We know what pure and overwhelming grief really is. We walk this road together as Compassionate Friends. And we remember, each of us in our own way. Todd's candle is one way to tell him that I love him as only a mother can love....unconditionally and forever. And I will always remember. I will always be Todd's mom. I have found that being a parent is a lifetime journey....even when our children are not with us on life's road. As parents, we define ourselves as interwoven with the fabric of our children's lives. We always remember. There is comfort in that.

*~ Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX*

When Words Become Gifts

By Nita Aasen

*In memory of my sons, Erik and David Aasen
St. Peter, Minnesota*

On Thanksgiving Day, 1994, two of my three young adult sons, Erik and David, were killed in a freak car accident. Years after the accident, my husband and I were at David's college alma mater for a holiday event. I was in the dessert line when a woman came up to me and said, "I saw your name tag—are you David Aasen's mom?" After doing a double take (it had been some time since I had been asked what used to be a rather common question), I replied with much appreciation, "Yes, I am!" With those three, almost magical, words this person gave me five gifts.

Her first gift was saying David's name. Instead of just thinking to herself, Hmmm, I bet that's David Aasen's mom but I better not say anything, she said something. Her second gift was sharing a story with me about how her daughter, a classmate of David's, still treasures the friendship she and David shared. Acknowledging that I'm still a mom was her all-important third gift. While my sons' deaths have resulted in my becoming a bereaved mother, death cannot take away the fact that I am, and always will be, Erik and David's mom.

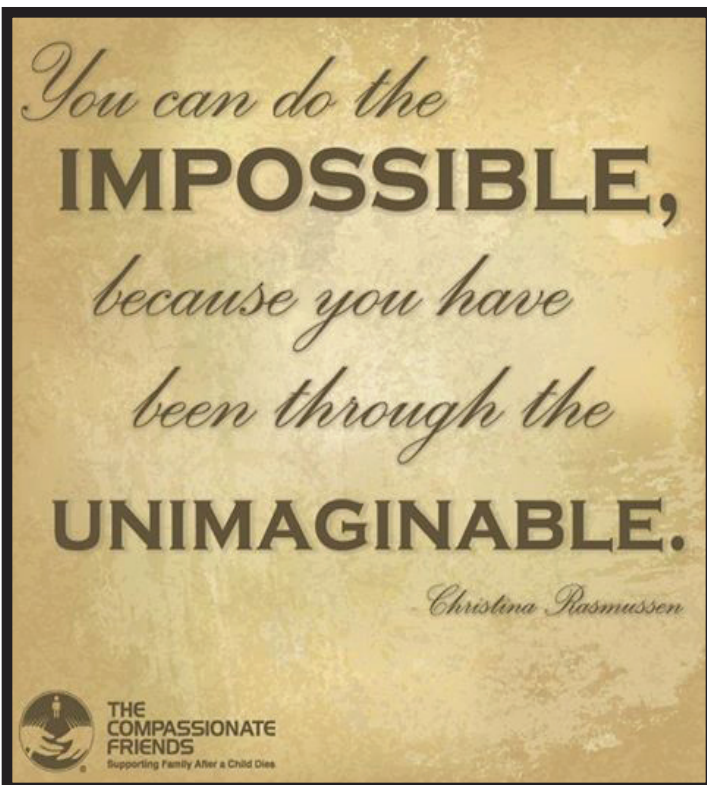
The fourth gift was permission to share a bit of my grief journey with her. Since their deaths, I explained, there

haven't been any truly easy, carefree, feeling-on-top-of-the-world days, but taking each day as it comes has been the most "doable" way for me to go on. Her questions and manner did not make me feel obligated to cover up my grief and was the fifth gift. I felt valued for my honesty and my integrity remained intact.

The warmth of those five gifts has lingered on in my heart and has comforted me. As I reflect on the experience, I marvel at how just a few simple words had such an impact. I have come to the conclusion that most bereaved parents want nothing more than the opportunity to talk comfortably with others about their children. Just being able to share stories about our sons and daughters in a safe place, along with the permission to mourn in our own way and for as long as we need to, even for a lifetime, is what matters most to us.

The real treasure comes when others introduce our children's names and stories into an everyday conversation. Knowing our sons and daughters are remembered and live on in the hearts and lives of others is a measure of the meaningful legacy that our sons and daughters have left to us and to the world.

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Grief Isn't Something to Get Over

The notion that one gets over it is a myth.

By Mary Lamia

The emotion of grief may be triggered by the loss of a loved one or the result of a life circumstance. Many people believe that if you have effectively mourned a loss you will then achieve closure. The notion that one mourns a loss and then gets over it, to the extent that emotions about the loss are not triggered in the future, is a myth.

Similarly, children have such expectations about getting over loss. They seem to believe that one needs to do something in particular in order to achieve that goal. Several years ago, as host of a radio talk show for kids, I asked listeners about the issue of loss. An eight-year old boy told me that his grandfather had died two weeks before and he wanted to know how to get over it—he thinks about him all the time and can't concentrate on anything else. A 12-year old boy explained that his dog had died and he wanted to know what to do since he couldn't say good-bye to her and didn't think that he could ever "fill [his] heart with anything else." I didn't ask what he meant by his choice of words, however, I felt its meaning. A 13-year old girl said that she asks her brother about what clothes look good on her because she doesn't have a mom, and it always feels like something is missing. She asked, "How do I get over my mom dying?"

The misguided notion that grief is a process that allows a final working through of a loss is likely the fault of my own profession—mental health professionals who have promoted this notion in their work with grieving individuals. Clinical data makes it clear that any significant loss, later and repeatedly, brings up longing and sadness. Is it because these people have not achieved closure by traversing prescribed stages of mourning or because they have not "worked through the loss" as some therapists boldly claim? No. It's because you never get over loss. As time passes, the intensity of feelings about the loss will lessen, you might also find ways to sooth or distract yourself, or you can partially bury grief-related feelings by creating new memories. But you're not going to get over it because that's impossible: you cannot erase emotional memory. Besides, it's not about achieving closure. Instead you have to figure out what you are going to do when your emotional memories are later triggered.

Emotions that have to do with loss are triggered throughout our lives. Usually they are in the form of anniversary reactions, such as the birthday or death day of the lost loved one or any significant holiday in which you might want to be with the person who is gone. Reminders, such as visiting a place you've been with the person you lost, will trigger a similar response. Episodes of depression or anxiety that seem to come from nowhere may have been activated by anniversary reactions or situation-matching reactions.

Grief can also be triggered by an age-matching anniversary reaction, which is when a person's age matches the age of a parent or loved one when they died. The remarkable power of age-matching anniversary reactions arising from the loss of a parent in childhood was demonstrated to me when I began training as a psychologist nearly 40 years ago. I had been treating a severely depressed man who, for many months, was not responsive to intensive psychotherapy or medication. Upon discovering with the patient that his depression began at a time in which his age matched his father's age of death, the

depression miraculously lifted. Beneath his depression lay a myriad of fears that he would be like his father, which included dying at the same age of his father as well as guilt that he was not like his father and could live a full life. Although he had been unaware of the age factor, his painful feelings seemed to recreate the trauma of his father's death, which was too overwhelming for him to feel when he was ten years old.

One of the reasons that grief happens to be triggered by external reminders, such as in anniversary reactions, is because grief is an emotion that sends a vague alert to help you to remember, rather than to forget. Even so, what most people do with grief is attempt to forget—to get over it—which is quite contrary to the purpose of the emotion. Rather than try to forget, one must attempt to remember and accept what the emotion is trying to convey. There are many ways to remember. You can remember what you learned from the person you lost, remember what you enjoyed, and you can cry if you feel like crying. Even if your grief is about a relationship gone bad, there is always something that you can learn through recollection.

There are related themes of loss that people express, and later grief responses related to those losses, such as the many women and men who have given up a child for adoption. The child's birth date does not pass by without an emotional reaction, whether or not they recognize it at the time. Similarly, the date a child would have been born for a childless woman who has had a miscarriage can trigger grief. The experience of loss when a relationship ends can be triggered on the former partner's birthday, on the anniversary of when you met, or on any holiday.

Whenever I am bothered by the thought of just how misguided the notion of stages of grieving can be, I remember one patient in particular who wanted help with the depression she had every summer, which at the time she told me was when her 12-year old child had died 25 years before. She sought therapy because she was convinced that something was wrong with her. Every June, for 25 years, she had experienced a grief response. Simply knowing that she wasn't crazy because of the intense emotions she felt made it a bit easier the next time June arrived. Rather than try to get rid of her painful feelings at the time, instead she learned to think about exactly what she would do to remember her son.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sums up the lifelong experience of grief in the first three lines of his poem, *Secret Anniversaries Of The Heart*:

The holiest of all holidays are those

Kept by ourselves in silence and apart;

The secret anniversaries of the heart.

From the Author: For more information regarding my books about emotions: <http://www.marylamia.com/> This blog is in no way intended as a substitute for medical or psychological counseling. If expert assistance or counseling is needed, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Source: Originally published at www.psychologytoday.com

Thanksgiving Marks Beginning of Holiday Madness and Sadness

In our society we have turned the holidays into a never ending round of parties, shopping, cooking, preparations for guests or travel and stress, lots and lots of stress. It begins in October with the not so subtle reminders from our friendly retail stores. Most of us dread this time of year because as members of Compassionate Friends, we have one more item on our list and it invariably is at the top.....my child is gone.....how can I handle the holidays?

This will be my third Thanksgiving without my son. We had 35 wonderful Thanksgiving celebrations together, and now it's just me. My only child is gone, my grandchildren now live solely in their mother's world. I am not a part of that world.

But I am learning to cope with this reality. I am learning that I can hold on to the traditions that don't cause me sadness and let go of those that do. As bereaved parents we fall into a unique category. As humans we accept that the loss of parents, spouses, aunts, uncles, siblings, friends and acquaintances is inevitable. But never, never, were we taught or conditioned to the idea that our children would or could precede us in death. The very notion of this shook us to our core.

Now we have lost our child to death. Nobody prepared us for this mind numbing loss. The rules have been broken. We have no coping skills. Our friends usually can't help. Our families try, but until one endures a loss of this magnitude, the ability to fully comprehend the never ending rounds of sadness is simply not there.

We do have a support system.....we can choose to participate or simply be there, in the moment, at our Compassionate Friends meetings. Here we find our most meaningful and helpful connection with other parents.....parents who are walking the road we now walk. These bereaved parents are here to help us on this unfamiliar road. They cannot answer every question because the answers don't exist to most questions. When will this pain end? When will life go back to "normal"? There are different types of pain and new kinds of normal. We gather each month to help each other, to lean on each other, to find hope in each other's ability to function. From this meeting of kindred souls

we do derive some solace, some peace and some hope. I have watched the newly bereaved, raw in their sadness when they first attend a meeting. As the months move forward, I begin to see a change in these parents. Each changes in a different way, for each experiences their loss and their grief process in a different way. Some changes aren't apparent for months, even a year or two. Learning that we are not alone in the grievous burden of our loss is comforting. Learning that others have developed ways to cope with the holidays, the birthdays, the death anniversaries and other special occasions gives us the hope that we, too, will one day feel comfortable in our new "normal."

I have chosen to accept this group of gentle, kind and compassionate friends as an integral part of my life. The first holidays were horrible. I learned that I had to do what I felt was right. I learned to let go of the expectations of others and live in the moment. Even if I plan to do something and change my mind, I feel no guilt. I learned that those who truly love me understand. I have found that I am truly becoming myself....my new self. It is a slow process. There are setbacks.

Holidays are extremely difficult for every parent who has lost a child.....it matters not how long ago our child died. The pain is fresh, new and raw at this time of year. This is the season for leaning on our compassionate friends, for asking questions, expressing fears, anxieties, doubts, depression and anger and for finding the comfort, hope and understanding that each of us so desperately seeks.

*~ Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX*



Enough of the Best

We became empty nesters
Long before it was the right time.
Our son James gave us the best years of his
life, but he couldn't give himself the rest of
his life. We won't be helping him set up his dorm
at college, he won't be telling us about
dating and experiences with relationships.
We won't be reading his Facebook status updates.
There won't be any more candles on his
birthday cake, no more Christmases or
Thanksgivings with either a visit, phone call,
cards or emails. We take part in family
festivities & milestone events and wish he could
be there celebrating too. We see grandchildren
and great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews
added to the family, generations continuing
for other family members, and we wonder
if James would have married and had children,
we wish we could have been grandparents too.
James gave us the best years of his life, if only
he could have seen the possibilities for
the rest of his life. All four of his grandparents
are still living, how we wish he could be
here to share their golden years. Perhaps even
to help and make life a little easier for them,
continue to make them laugh, show them
card tricks, have discussions about life,
religion, politics, technology.
James gave them the best years of his life,
if only he could have been around for the
rest of their lives.
Sometimes the best has to be good enough,
even though we didn't have enough time,
enough memories, enough hugs, not enough
laughter, not nearly enough pictures.
So for the rest of our life we have to be content
to make the best of the years ahead.
James gave us the best years of his life,
even though he didn't give himself the rest
of his life, we have the remainder of our
lives to show him and to give each other,
love, hugs, and hopefully, enough.....

~Meg Avery in memory of
her son James 7/15/83 - 9/22/97



The Mask of Grief

As the beautiful colors of Fall surround us and the air is sweetened and chilled, we, the brokenhearted parents and families of those children who left us too soon, begin to find the strength and perseverance to face another season, another anniversary, another rush of memories. Perhaps Halloween brings with it visions of little candy grabbing goblins and gossamer-clad fairy children. Perhaps those memories aren't available to some of us. All of us pick up our masks right around this time of year and put them on. Our masks are different though.

When our children died, we discovered that the raw and horrible pain we were probably in showed up on our faces, in the way we stood, in the way we walked and talked. We soon discovered that, even though we had many close and loving friends and family, they were not comfortable with watching us bleed to death from the inside out...so we constructed a mask.

Masquerade Balls and Pagan ceremonies are ancient rituals. The idea of "masking" one's identity for a short time and celebrating with wild abandon is as appealing in our society as it was in those ancient times. Unfortunately, the bereaved have a different reason for donning the mask. We force our mask to smile when the lump in our throat and the heaviness in our chest threaten to choke us. Our eyes leak profusely, despite the waterproof mascara and pancake make-up we women keep applying...Men put on a stoic and strong facade, sometimes failing miserably and breaking down with terrible beauty.

I urge you to be gentle with your mask. Put it on thoughtfully and take it off with great care. There are safe places to leave it and one of those places is with those of us who travel this path with you.

~Kerry Marston, TCF Atlanta, GA

*"A knowledge that another has felt as
we have felt, and seen things not much
otherwise than we have seen them,
will continue to the end to be one
of life's choicest blessings."*

~ Robert Lewis Stevenson

The Compassionate Friends

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We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.
Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.
We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.
We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief,
but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.
But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share,
just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.
We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace,
share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.